

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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R 221645Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4265

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 0409

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS, LY

SUBJ: NOUIRA EXPLAINS STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO
TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER

REF: (A) TUNIS 290, (B) TUNIS 322.

1. SUMMARY. PM NOUIRA HAS LAUNCHED CAMPAIGN TO EXPLAIN
STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER, AS FAVORED
BY HIM AND AS ADOPTED ON JAN 15 (REF A) AT JOINT COUNCIL OF
MINISTERS AND PARTY POLITICAL BUREAU MEETING. IN SPEECH TO
PARTY AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ON JAN 21, HE OUTLINED
CONSTITUTIONAL APPROACH TO REFERENDUM TO BE CARRIED OUT
SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH CONSULTATION WITH LIBYANS AS WELL AS
WITH OTHER MAGHREB STATES. NOUIRA'S SPEECH OBVIOUSLY
INTENDED RESPOND TO PRESS STATEMENTS OF FORMER FONMIN
MASMOUDI AND LOCAL PRESS ARTICLE BY FORMER MIN JUSTICE
MOHAMED BELLALOUNA THAT CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION NOT RPT NOT
NECESSARY. NOUIRA ALSO GAVE INTERVIEW TO LE MONDE SAYING
THAT JAN 12 ANNOUNCEMENT RE UNION WAS ESSENTIALLY AN
AFFIRMATION OF "PRINCIPLE" AND DEFINITION OF AN OBJECTIVE".
GOT INFORMATIONAL MEDIA RESOURCES CAN BE EXPECTED TO
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CONTINUE TO STRESS GRADUALISTIC THEME OVER COMING MONTHS.

END SUMMARY.

2. PM NOUIRA, IN SPEECH TO HASTILY CALLED JOINT MEETING OF GOVERNORS, "PSD LEADERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS" JAN 21, MADE STATEMENTS ON UNION MERGER PROCEDURE WHICH APPEAR REPRESENT BEGINNING OF PUBLIC EXPLANATION OF STEP-BY-STEP MOVE TOWARD MERGER. (MEETING FOR GOVERNORS ALONE HAD FIRST BEEN SCHEDULED FOR JAN 21 WITH MIN INT TAHAR BELKHODJA PRESIDING). NOUIRA SPEECH (FBIS SHOULD HAVE TEXT) MADE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. AS STATED IN DECLARATION OF JAN 15 (REF A), PRINCIPLE OF UNION AS PROCLAIMED AT JERBA IS UNANIMOUSLY SUPPORTED BY POLITICAL BUREAU AND COUNCIL OF MINISTERS.

B. CONSTITUTION WILL BE REVISED ACCORDING TO NORMAL PROCEDURE TO "INTRODUCE PRINCIPLE OF REFERENDUM". MESSAGE TO THIS EFFECT, SIGNED BY BOURGUIBA, HAS BEEN SENT TO PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. IT MUST FOLLOW "NORMAL PROCEDURE" FOR ADOPTION.

C. IN MEANTIME, TUNISIA WILL CONTINUE CONTACTS WITH LIBYAN GOVERNMENT ON CONTENT AND FORM OF UNION.

D. AT SAME TIME, GOT WILL CARRY OUT CONTACTS WITH OTHER MAGHREBIAN COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY ALGERIA AND MOROCCO, TO DISCUSS PLANNED MERGER IN CONTEXT LONG-STANDING AIM OF BUILDING GREATER MAGHREB.

E. THROUGHOUT ENTIRE PROCESS, PUBLIC WILL BE FULLY INFORMED SO THAT EACH STEP WILL BE TAKEN WITHOUT ANY AMBIGUITY OR MENTAL RESERVATION.

3. NOUIRA, IN INTERVIEW TO LE MONDE IN JAN 20 ISSUE (REF B), EXCERPT OF WHICH PUBLISHED LOCAL PRESS, STATED JAN 12 AGREEMENT FOR HIM IS "PROCLAMATION OF AN IDEAL, AFFIRMATION OF A PRINCIPLE AND DEFINITION OF AN OBJECTIVE". NOW NECESSARY DEFINE FORM AND CONTENT. CONSULTATIONS WITH OTHER MAGHREB STATES WOULD BE IN CONFORMITY WITH ARTICLE 2 OF CONSTITUTION WHICH STATES TUNISIA IS PART OF GREATER CONFIDENTIAL

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MAGHREB, "TOWARD UNITY OF WHICH IT WORKS IN FRAMEWORK OF COMMON INTEREST.

4. TWO DAYS BEFORE NOUIRA ADVOCATED CONSTITUTIONAL APPROACH TO REFERENDUM, INDEPENDENT ARABIC DAILY, ES-SABAH, JAN 19 CARRIED SIGNED ARTICLE BY FORMER MIN JUSTICE MOHAMED BELLALOUNA TAKING EXCEPTION TO NEED TO AMEND CONSTITUTION. BELLALOUNA, WHO KNOWN AS CLOSE MASMOUDI

SUPPORTER AND WHO RECENTLY ELECTED DEAN OF TUNISIAN LAWYERS (BATTONNIER), CLAIMS REFERENDUM DOES NOT REQUIRE CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION SINCE CONSTITUTION EMANATES FROM PEOPLE AND ON MAJOR QUESTION PEOPLE CAN BE CONSULTED DIRECTLY. TWO OTHER LEGAL EXPERTS, HOWEVER, HAVE PRINTED ARTICLES REBUTTING THIS ARGUMENT. LAWYERS' MEETING PRESIDED BY BELLALOUNA ON JAN 16 HAD SENT TELEGRAM TO PRESIDENTS QADHAFI AND BOURGUIBA SUPPORTING MERGER BUT MAKING NO MENTION OF REFERENDUM.

5. MEETING OF UGTT JAN 20 WAS ATTENDED BY MASMOUDI WHO AS ASST SEC GEN OF PSD WAS RANKING PSD OFFICIAL AT MEETING. HE REPORTEDLY DID NOT SPEAK BUT RECEIVED HEAVY APPLAUSE WHEN UGTT SEC GEN HABIB ACHOUR ACKNOWLEDGED HIS PRESENCE. PARTY DIRECTOR MOHAMED SAYAH SPOKE FOR PSD AND ACCORDING PRESS REPORTS MADE ONLY BRIEF GENERAL ALLUSION TO ARAB UNITY. ACHOUR REPORTEDLY SPOKE OF MERGER IN TERMS SIMILAR TO NOUIRA SPEECH.

6. COMMENT: UNDER NOUIRA'S DIRECTION, GOT QUITE OBVIOUSLY EMBARKING ON CAMPAIGN AT HOME AND ABROAD TO EXPLAIN THAT APPROACH TO MERGER MUST BE GRADUALISTIC. GOT CAN BE EXPECTED TO USE INFORMATIONAL MEDIA TO STRESS THIS THEME. GOT NO DOUBT FACES DIFFICULT TASK SINCE NOT ONLY TUNISIAN RANK AND FILE, BUT NUMBER OF PSD LEADERS FAVOR UNION NOW. SEELYE

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